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AUGUST IS NATIONAL BREASTFEEDING MONTH

August 1-7 is World Breastfeeding Week and Black Breastfeeding Week is August 25-31

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Okaloosa County, Fla.— The Florida Department of Health and partners across the state are celebrating World Breastfeeding Week 2018 during August 1-7, 2018. This year's theme is Breastfeeding: Foundation of Life.

"We know that an infant's first 1,000 days are a crucial time for ensuring the child grows up healthy and thriving, and breastfeeding can significantly improve health outcomes for both mothers and infants," said State Surgeon General and Secretary Dr. Celeste Philip. "Supporting mom and encouraging breastfeeding in the first days of baby's life are essential steps for ensuring successful breastfeeding."

The Florida Department of Health is working to promote breastfeeding as a vital health activity, and encourages breastfeeding-friendly hospitals, child care facilities, work places and communities. **"In Okaloosa, the Health Department is working with both delivery hospitals to advance breastfeeding initiation and working with Healthy Okaloosa worksites and child care centers to implement policies to support breastfeeding mothers,"** says Dr. Karen Chapman, Director of the DOH-Okaloosa. **Okaloosa has 20 worksites and 15 child care centers designated as breastfeeding friendly worksites** either through the Florida Quest for Quality Maternity Care or through the Florida Department of Health.

As a part of the department's Healthiest Weight Florida and Florida's Healthy Babies initiatives, the Baby Steps to Baby Friendly project focuses on increasing breastfeeding initiation and duration among Florida women. To learn more about Baby Steps to Baby Friendly, visit <http://www.healthiestweightflorida.com/activities/baby-steps.html>

There are steps everyone can take to help improve breastfeeding rates:

- Promote the implementation of the Baby-Friendly Hospital initiative;
- Provide access to skilled breastfeeding counseling. Studies have shown that breastfeeding promotion interventions increase exclusive and any breastfeeding rates at 4-6 weeks and at six months; and
- Encourage employers and communities to promote and support breastfeeding.

The World Breastfeeding Week 2018 encourages everyone to be an advocate for breastfeeding. When a mom chooses to breastfeed, she helps improve baby's overall health and prevents malnutrition. Breastfeeding has positive lifelong health effects on infants, children and mothers such as lower incidence of respiratory infections and ear infections for infants and children and reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancer for mothers. Also, breastfeeding reduces the risk of overweight and obesity compared to formula feeding.

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The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for infants for the first year of life and beyond, with the addition of appropriate complementary foods when the infant is developmentally ready, around six months of age.

Breastfeeding provides food security to infants from the very beginning of life, contributes to food security for the whole family, and ensures food security for babies even in times of household or widespread disasters, such as hurricanes. The economic benefits of breastfeeding can help break the cycle of poverty for families, which impacts hunger and malnutrition. With no additional burden on household income, breastfeeding is a low-cost way of feeding babies and contributes to poverty reduction. Breastfeeding can also reduce costs to the health care system and employers by decreasing costs of hospitalizations, medications, and reduced absenteeism.

DOH-Okaloosa holds breastfeeding classes in the WIC clinic in Fort Walton Beach and Crestview, for more information, contact WIC, 850-833-9254 or 689-7858. For more information about the Florida WIC program, call 1-800-342-3556 or visit www.FloridaWIC.org. To learn more about breastfeeding initiatives in Florida, visit www.flbreastfeeding.org.

About the Florida Department of Health

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